

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

WASHINGTON, D.C.

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11/21

Mr. Vice President -

In response to my request, the CIA has prepared the attached summary of initial reactions abroad to yesterday's speeches in Jerusalem.


You may wish to read it prior to your lunch with the President today.


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
Mr. Vice President -
The attached is a 10 a.m.,
November 21 update of foreign
reaction to the Sadat and
Begin speeches.


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ESCH: NLC-133-59-1-7-1

BY:  DATE 8/8/2013

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21 November 1977

MEMORANDUM

International Reaction to the Sadat and Begin Speeches

Summary

Except in the Arab world, international reaction to the speeches yesterday by Egyptian President Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Begin has thus far been minimal. Arab commentary on the speeches has followed rather predictable patterns. Syria has castigated Sadat for acknowledging the "existence of Israel" and Begin for ignoring the rights of the Palestinians. Iraqi and Libyan commentary has been particularly harsh. One militant official of the Palestine Liberation Organization has also criticized Sadat for "turning his back" on the Arabs and Begin for failing to mention the PLO.

Palestinian leaders on the West Bank generally faulted Sadat only for his failure to refer to the PLO. A Jordanian spokesman reportedly remarked that Sadat's speech eliminated many fears and doubts about his motives.

Outside of the Arab world, the harshest response to Sadat's visit is coming from the Soviets and their East European allies. The Soviets, however, have not commented authoritatively, and the only direct criticism of Sadat has appeared in low-level publications. Moscow appears to be leaving itself room for maneuver should the Sadat-Begin talks lead to a resumption of a Middle East peace conference.

Most West European states have commented favorably on the visit; Latin American, African, and Asian states have thus far remained silent.

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~Egypt and Israel

In the face of Arab opposition to Sadat's visit, most Egyptians are banding together in support of their President. There is an apparently spontaneous outpouring of support and good wishes to Sadat, and Prime Minister Salim and, more important, Defense Minister Jamasi have publicly expressed their backing. The leaders of Egypt's Muslim and Christian communities, key factions of the Egyptian parliament, and other interest groups have issued strong messages of support. A large welcoming demonstration is being planned for Sadat's return to Cairo today.

This positive sentiment, however, is by no means unanimous. Many Egyptians are wondering whether Sadat has taken too great a risk and whether he has been entirely candid about his motives. The resignation of Foreign Minister Fahmi just before Sadat's departure for Israel has, in effect, made opposition to Sadat's move a respectable position, but most Egyptians will probably withhold any public judgment until the outcome of the visit can be evaluated. According to the US Embassy in Cairo, most Egyptians do not have a clear idea what the measure of success should be; most will presumably base their judgment not only on the tangible results of the visit but on the less tangible atmospherics it generates in the Arab world.

Some Israelis apparently were somewhat disappointed that Sadat's speech was designed more to protect his flank against Arab criticism than to win over Israel through a greater show of flexibility. Press reports indicate that members of the Knesset generally admired Sadat's courage in coming to Jerusalem, but were disappointed that he broke no new ground in his speech.

The Arab World

Despite the relatively cautious nature of Sadat's speech, the Syrian media reacted critically. Damascus radio quickly "took issue" with several portions of the address, particularly Sadat's admission of the "existence of Israel." A later broadcast characterized the speech as Sadat's "final capitulation" to the Israelis. The Syrian commentary also castigated Begin for, among other things, ignoring the rights of the Palestinian people in his speech.

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Syria's adverse reaction to Sadat's speech was probably governed by its misgivings about his initiative from the beginning. Syrian leaders continue to distrust Sadat's motives and fear that by breaking Arab ranks he means ultimately to make a separate peace.

There has been no official reaction from the Palestine Liberation Organization, although various Palestinians did voice their opinions. Mahmud Labidi, a PLO official in Beirut, doubted that Sadat had accomplished anything by going to Israel. A militant member of the PLO Executive Committee, Yasir Abd ar-Rabbuh, was quoted by Syrian radio as accusing "the traitor" Sadat of turning his back on the Arabs.

The reaction of PLO chief Yasir Arafat and other PLO leaders could well be influenced by the Syrian response, as well as by Sadat's failure to mention the PLO in his speech.

Palestinian leaders on the West Bank generally found little fault with Sadat's exposition of the Arab cause, except with his lack of reference to the PLO, and saw nothing new in Begin's speech. Like other Arabs, West Bank residents appear to be waiting for some gesture from the Israelis or the US before crediting Sadat with a success.

We have no reactions yet from Saudi Arabia or the Persian Gulf states. Jordanian Information Minister Adnan Abu Awdah, however, reportedly stated that Sadat's speech eliminated many fears and doubts. Jordanian comment on Sadat's trip has been cautious; officials in Amman probably are still assessing the ramifications of his initiative.

Iraqi commentary on Sadat's remarks was predictably harsh and in line with Baghdad's basic opposition to settlement efforts. Libya took a similarly hard stand; it called the speech a disgrace and a submission. Algerian President Boumediene telephoned Syrian President Asad last night to express his support for Syria and to criticize Sadat.

USSR and Eastern Europe

The Soviets are continuing publicly to discredit the Sadat visit, but at a relatively low level in order to avoid any possible international criticism. Unlike November 1975, when Moscow issued an authoritative

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denunciation on the eve of Sadat's visit to the US, Soviet commentary thus far has been routine and has consisted mostly of Arabic-language broadcasts that repeat critical comments from the Arab press. This caution gives Moscow room for maneuver should the summit talks lead to a resumption of the Geneva conference and enables it to avoid charges of "irresponsibility" from those who supported the visit.

The most outspoken criticism of Sadat thus far has appeared in obscure publications, which have accused the Egyptian leader of "splitting" the Arab world and "opposing" the best interests of the Palestinians.

The most imaginative TASS item was issued yesterday and dealt with an Arab student demonstration in Moscow that the Soviets may have conceived. The only occurrence more unusual than a demonstration in Moscow is the discussion of such a demonstration by a Soviet news agency.

East European reaction has predictably followed the Soviet lead in most cases. The most loyal allies, such as Bulgaria, have virtually indicted Sadat for capitulating to Israeli demands. The Poles have merely warned that the talks would have no "practical or effective results." The more independent Romanians and Yugoslavs have thus far remained silent.

Western Europe

The European Community was on the verge of issuing a statement in support of Sadat's visit, but the French blocked the effort as "premature." France reportedly did so because of Arab opposition to the visit and because of the widespread speculation that the US had orchestrated the move. The French were probably reluctant also because Prime Minister Barre is scheduled to visit Damascus later this week.

Several NATO countries, including the UK, West Germany, Italy, and Turkey, have issued statements supporting Sadat's venture. Belgium is also considering a unilateral statement of support.

Third World

The countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia thus far have not taken much note of the Egyptian-Israeli

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meetings. Privately, the US Ambassadors in Gabon and India have received expressions of support for Sadat from President Bongo and Foreign Minister Vajpayee respectively.

Since the Arabs themselves are split, the South Asians will try very hard to avoid offending anyone. If pushed, India might tend to move more publicly toward Egypt. Pakistan and Bangladesh will approach the Saudi position, and Afghanistan might follow the Soviet lead.

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Reaction to Sadat's Trip and the
Knesset Speeches

Israel:

The joint Israeli-Egyptian communique -- read by Begin at today's press conference -- was bland and did not give Sadat the kind of Israeli response that could assuage his Arab critics and, in Arab eyes, make the visit a success:

"In response to the sincere and courageous move by President Sadat and believing in the need to continue the dialogue along the lines proposed by both sides during their exchanges and the presentation of the positions in the historic meaning in Jerusalem and in order to enhance the prospect of the fruitful consummation of this significant visit the government of Israel, expressing the will of the people of Israel, proposes that this hopeful step be further pursued through dialogue between the two countries concerned, thereby paving the way toward successful negotiations leading to the signing of peace treaties in Geneva with all the neighboring states."

Israeli press commentary today on Sadat's Knesset speech has characterized it as both "impressive" and disappointing. Many editorials noted Sadat's tough and "aggressive" line and the gap which remains between Israeli and Egyptian thinking as evidenced by both Begin's and Sadat's speeches. Nevertheless, some papers argued that Sadat's approach in his speech was expected, as was the fact that no substantive agreement was expressed. The Israeli public's enthusiasm for Sadat and his bold step in coming to Israel, however, does not appear to have been diminished considerably by the speeches.

This sense of disappointment, according to Jerusalem Radio, was also evidenced among many Knesset members. In part, this was due to Sadat's "unequivocal demands," but even more so to the belief that Begin's speech was lackluster and failed to seize the "historic opportunity" of Israel's responding concretely to Sadat's initiative.

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Sadat received a small group of West Bank leaders at his hotel early today, among them: Bethlehem's mayor Freij, former Nablus mayor Hikmat al-Masri, and West Bank notable Anwar Khatib. These men expressed support for Sadat's initiative in coming to Israel, but Freij and Khatib criticized Begin's Knesset speech as merely relating old ideas. It should be noted that more radical West Bank leaders did not participate in this session. Jerusalem Radio reported that West Bankers reacted favorably to Sadat's Knesset speech.

Egypt:

The Egyptian media has responded positively but defensively to Sadat's Knesset speech and his entire trip.

--Al-Akbar said, "the Arab rejection front has hysterically escalated the campaign before even knowing the results of his visit." The President's speech in the Knesset was the best reply to those rejectionists, according to the newspaper.

--Al-Ahram declared that Sadat's speech frustrated those who try to distort Sadat's trip. "The hour of truth came to announce in the Knesset itself that Arab Egypt, Egypt the leader of the October Battle, is also Egypt the leader of the battle for a just peace."

Egyptian officials are planning a massive demonstration of popular support for Sadat upon his return. Up to three million people are expected to line the streets.

Arab Reaction:

Arab reaction became increasingly personal in its attack on Sadat:

--Iraq's al-Jumhuriyah called for a revolution to transform Arab wrath into action. The "capitulationist schemes" of liquidating the Arab cause must be thwarted.

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- 3 -

--Syria's Tishriin declared "Sadat has said he was going to Israel for peace; he spoke before the Knesset yesterday and announced capitulation. Sadat has entered history as a spineless person and a traitor. His name will be mentioned from now on with those of Petain, Lavelle and Quisling."

--The Algerian Council of Ministers yesterday condemned Sadat's visit.

--Libyan newspapers for the second straight day were published with black borders. Commentaries on Libyan radio called for Sadat's overthrow.

--Beirut's moderate independent daily an-Nahar warned that a reshuffling among the Arab alliances is likely to occur as a result of the Sadat visit.

Soviets:

The Soviet media has continued to give prominent play to negative reaction to Sadat's visit in the Arab world. TASS late yesterday catalogued the continuing critical statements and protest demonstrations evidenced in Syria, Lebanon, and elsewhere.

At the same time, Soviet commentary on the visit has remained sparse, although Moscow Radio carried another editorial by commentator Timoshkin late yesterday. Timoshkin asserted that "no respectable Arab could be anything but indignant at this step of Sadat" and that "the Israeli aggressor and his American protectors are jubilant." In Soviet terms, however, the commentary was relatively mild in its criticism.

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